

August 1942 Hurricane

The months of June and July 1942 and the first half of August 1942 saw no tropical development. Finally on August 17, a tropical storm formed near the Yucatan. It developed quickly into a category one hurricane, moved inland near Galveston and proceeded northward through East Texas. As the remnants of this storm were



Track of the August 22-31, 1942 Hurricane across the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico

dissipating on August 21, a new tropical storm formed near the Leeward Islands. It moved along a west northwest course, strengthening to a hurricane on August 24, and beginning a slow swing toward the northwest. By August 29, it had become a category 3 hurricane with sustained winds well over 100 mph and was located 400 miles southeast of Matagorda,

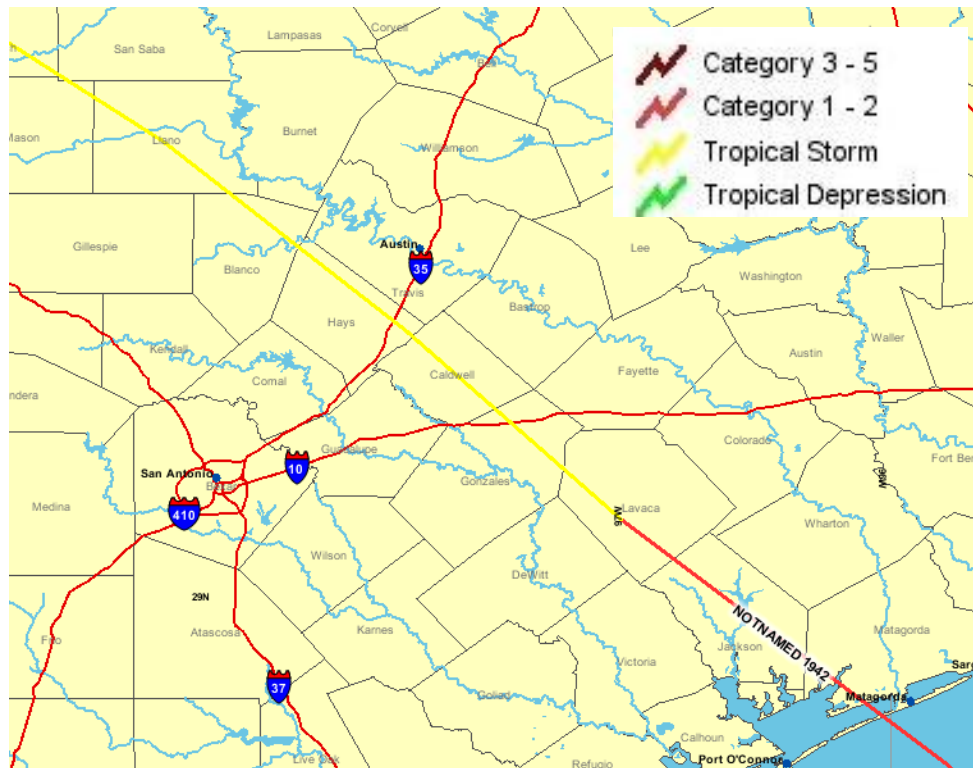
Texas. The peak winds reach 115 mph over the Gulf of Mexico. The hurricane continued to move toward the northwest, directly toward the mid Texas coast.

The hurricane struck the Texas coast near Matagorda, just after midnight on the morning of August 30, 1942. School buildings had been prepared as shelters and thousands of refugees had already been evacuated prior to landfall by a convoy of trucks, buses and trains. Rain squalls complicated their escape. Several boats and barges were reported damaged or sunk in the fury of the winds. Tides accompanying the hurricane were estimated at 15 feet, and the combination of winds and tides destroyed nearly every home and building in the town of Matagorda. Water was reported to be standing in the town up to 8 feet deep.

By 6 am on the morning of Sunday, August 30, the hurricane had weakened to a very strong tropical storm, and was located near Hallettsville, with sustained winds of 60 mph. Near noon that day, the tropical storm had moved between the metropolitan areas of Austin and San Antonio and was located near San Marcos, with sustained winds

over 50 mph. As it continued northwestward, it slowly weakened, reaching near the town of Llano by the evening of the August 30. Shortly afterward, it diminished to a tropical depression and dissipated near Sweetwater on August 31, 1942.

The destruction and devastation brought to South Central Texas by this hurricane is the worst in the 20th century. Its path was well marked from the mid coast inland. The Victoria county sheriff's department reported "every house damaged to some extent."



Storm track August 30-31, 1942. Tropical Storm crossing I-10, I-35, and the Hill Country

Cuero reported peak winds near hurricane force, causing extensive damage to hundreds of homes and widespread crop damage. Yoakum reported more damage from this hurricane than from any other event in its history. The towns of Refugio, Palacios and Edna were also reported by the weather bureau in Houston to have been hit very hard.

Communications were cut off in Corpus Christi and Aransas Pass. Severe damage was reported to buildings and homes in Beeville, Sinton and Rockport.

Further inland from the coast, numerous buildings were damaged in Floresville. Nearly 4 inches of rain fell over much of Atascosa County, with trees uprooted and many homes damaged. Seguin reported dozens of homes damaged and hundreds of trees uprooted by the "worst storm experienced here since the big blow of 1886." Damage in New Braunfels was mainly confined to trees. The city of Austin reported widespread trees and power lines blown down.

The City of San Antonio was battered by 50 to 70 mph wind gusts for more than five hours, causing extensive damage to homes and utilities. Electric power and telephone service were lost across the city. Winds damaged all but five of the 75 aircraft at San

Antonio municipal airport in spite of stakes being driven 8 feet in the ground to hold the planes. The greatest damage in San Antonio was to trees. Hundreds of old, large trees were uprooted in what was generally regarded as the greatest destruction in the city's history since 1899. One historic building that did not apparently suffer severely from the storm was the Alamo. Although the Alamo grounds were badly damaged, with many old large trees blown over, the ancient wall successfully resisted the storm.

The 1942 hurricane that caused so much damage to South Central Texas is a reminder that even Texans living well away from the coast can become the victims of hurricanes and tropical storms. It is important to be prepared for all the associated threats, the damaging winds, the heavy rainfall, and even tornadoes.